The Perceptions of Elementary Teachers and District Administrators Regarding the Placement of African American Males in Special Education Programs

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Far too many people never realize their dreams due to lack of opportunity and the limited interest taken in them during their formative years. My intention with this dissertation is to inspire and motivate educators working with students that have perceived behavioral problems. Do not give up on our youth. Children are the future.

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CHAPTER I: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of elementary teachers and district administrators regarding the placement of African American males in special education programs. In this chapter, I will provide an overview of the study as it relates to the placement of African American male students in specific categories of special education in order to set the context for the study. I will then present the statement of the problem, the purpose and significance of the study.

Background of the Problem

African American children are overrepresented within specific categories of special education in the public school system (Codrington & Fairchild, 2012). Codrington & Fairchild (2012) say,

> The 29th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2007) revealed the following trends: African American students six through 21 years of age were approximately 1.5 times more likely to receive special education services than same-age students in all other racial/ethnic groups combined." (p. 3)

African American students represent about 16.6 % of the students within the nation's public school system but represent more than 30% of the students in special education (National Association for the Education of African American Children with Learning Differences, 2012). Furthermore, African American males represent almost 80% of African American students placed in special education (National Association for the Education of African American Children with Learning Differences, 2012). This situation presents a problem for society at large because African American male students are more prone to experience lower levels of

achievement and limited postsecondary and employment opportunities. (Markowitz, Garcia, & Eichelberger, 1997; Patton, 1998**)**.

The overrepresentation of African American students within special education, particularly African American males identified under the qualifying labels of emotional disturbance (ED), intellectual disability (ID), and learning disability (LD) has become widespread across the nation (Patton, 1998; Irvine, 2012). Furthermore, the overrepresentation of African American males within special education is greater in the judgmental or "soft" disability categories of emotional disturbance (ED), intellectual disability (ID), and learning disability (LD) than in the nonjudgmental or "hard" disability categories, such as hearing impairment, orthopedic impairment, or visual impairment (Donovan & Cross, 2002). "These categories require a high degree of professional judgment for consensus, however, and in many ways could be interpreted subjectively with different outcomes depending on the cultural competence of the assessor" (Howard, 2008, p. 958). In comparison to other students in special education, African American male students also have the least amount of access to needed services and the worst social and academic outcomes. A limited amount of empirically based guidance is presently available to inform the development of effective cultural interventions for African American male students (Hayling, Kern, Serpell, & Stevenson, 2009). This situation has caused a great deal of concern within the African American and educational communities (Atkison-Bradley, Johnson, Plunkett, & Rawls, 2006).

While African American students are overrepresented collectively in special education, the situation is even more dire when it comes to African American males. African American males represent almost 80% of African American students placed in special education (National Association for the Education of African American Children with Learning Differences, 2012).

The overrepresentation of African American males within special education presents a problem not only for African Americans but society at large. African American male students in special education are prone to experience limited access to postsecondary education and employment opportunities (Markowitz et al., 1997; Patton 1998**)**.

Studies have shown that there are many reasons for the overrepresentation of African American males in specific categories of special education. Some of the primary reasons include teachers' attitudes, test bias, and environmental and cultural factors.

Teachers and Schools

The attitudes and beliefs of educators have played an important role in determining the success of African American male students (Noguera, 2008). Howard says, "In order for African American male students to succeed within the school setting, educators need to become more conscious of the role that racism plays in the school environment" (2008, p. 955). Teachers who have bought into stereotypes associated with African American males often create unwelcoming environments for their African American male students (Noguera, 2008). Research has shown that if a teacher believes that a student's intellectual capacity is low, the teacher will base their level of instruction accordingly (Hilliard, 1992). Thus, it is not always the limitations of a student that prevents them from learning; it is the underestimation by the teacher of the student's ability or the teacher's inability to understand their students learning potential. This situation causes the teacher to "water down" the level of instruction or refer certain students for special education services (Hilliard, 1992).

The behavior of White educators toward African American male students is often based on stereotypes that emanate from society and the media. When a student's social identity suggests a high potential for success then they are treated accordingly by the teacher. These types

of students receive more patience within the school setting and are taught from a more rigorous curriculum which allows the student to eventually develop into the student the teacher originally imagined. The opposite applies when there are negative expectancies of students based on group representation (Elliot & Dweck, 2007). African American male students have historically been associated with the latter which leads to an unsupportive learning environment in which they are not provided with the necessary guidance to reach their highest academic and social potential (Elliot & Dweck, 2007).

An overrepresentation of White teachers exists within the nation's public school system in comparison to the makeup of the student population. This situation increases the chances that schools will continue to respond to African American males in a manner that underestimates their ability to learn. Feistritzer (2011) statest that "Statistics on the racial composition of teachers in the U.S. indicate that 84% of the K-12 teaching force is White and female" (p. 11). He goes on to say, "The immediate future does not look to be very different as the majority of all current teacher education students are White females and are being instructed by a teacher education faculty who are also mostly White" (p. 15).

In addition to the attitudes of educators, the public school system itself is not prepared to meet the needs of African American male students. Research indicates a lack of support for African American male students in the areas of cultural sensitivity. Schools are often not prepared to offer appropriate guidance to ensure the success of African American students and fail to take into consideration the obstacles that many of these students face on a daily basis such as racial discrimination and lower socioeconomic status (Noguera, 2008). According to Hilliard (1992),

> Misunderstanding of cultural behavioral has been shown to lead to errors in the estimation of a student's or a cultural group's: (1) intellectual potential (the consequences of which- mislabeling, misplacement, and mistreatment of children-are enormous), (2) learned abilities or achievement in academic subjects such as reading, and (3) language abilities." (p. 372).

These under estimations of African Americans' abilities often lead to educators teaching at a level below the students' knowledge capacity.

An additional issue to consider is the unequal opportunity among students within the general education setting. Students whose educational opportunities are limited achieve accordingly and are more likely to receive special educational services (Skiba et al., 2008). Two additional contributing factors are the referral process and eligibility requirements of special education.

Test Bias and Environmental Factors

Other factors involved in the overrepresentation of African American males in special education include test bias found in intelligence tests and standardized tests of achievement (Skiba et al., 2008). Another factor to be considered is socioeconomic status and the influence of poverty (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Additional factors that can impact a student's behavior within the school setting include family health care, home stability, and stress (Howard, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Schools and districts do not provide African American male students with the supports they need (academic and behavioral) to find success in the general education classroom. Instead, they are more likely to experience low quality pedagogy by teachers who do not understand them. This fact, that they are not understood or taught leads to their over identification and then

overrepresentation in special education. It is important to gain insight into what teachers and administrators perceive to be the ways to reduce overrepresentation of African American male students in special education in order to address this ongoing problem.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the perceptions of elementary teachers and administrators from one school district regarding the placement of African American males in special education programs. This study was intended to benefit educational professionals and perhaps prevent erroneous placement in special education services that often do more harm than good for this population of participants. The possibility of identifying errors or flaws in the process for identifying students for special education services might help to prevent overrepresentation of African American males in specific categories of special education. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What do teachers and administrators perceive to be the early intervention measures in school policies and procedures that should be used by a school or school district to prevent the overrepresentation of African American males in special education?
2. What do teachers and administrators perceive to be the types of professional development for instruction that should help in preventing overrepresentation of African American males in special education?
3. What do teachers and administrators perceive to be the changes that should be made to federal, state, and district policies to prevent the overrepresentation of African American males in special education?

Importance of the Study

This study contributes to our understanding of what administrators and teachers perceive to be the solutions to reducing African American male students' overrepresentation in special education. It also provides insight into their perceptions of the changes that should be made to federal, state, and district policies.

On a personal note, I learned several things from this study that will assist me within my career as an educator. One of the things that I have learned is the importance of being culturally sensitive to the needs of the students that I work with. I will utilize this knowledge to help inform my colleagues of the cultural behaviors and various obstacles that African American male students encounter within their lives. It is my hope that this will help decrease the number of African American male students referred for special education based services. Another thing that this study helped me to realize is the profound influence that I can have on students as a male educator of African American descent. I realize that many African American male student do not have positive role models within their lives and I want to inspire the students that I work with by advocating for their right to be educated within the least restrictive environment so that they can reach their highest academic and social potential.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is comprised of five chapters. This chapter provided a brief review of background information regarding the overrepresentation of African American males in Special Education identified under the qualifying categories of emotional disturbance, intellectual disturbance, and specific learning disability. Chapter one included the purpose and importance of the study in addition to its limitations and delimitations. Lastly, chapter one included a list of definitions of key terms found in the special education field. Chapter two consists of a review of

research literature pertaining to the problem of overrepresentation in special education of African American males. Chapter three details the methodology and research design of the study. The data and results of the study are analyzed and assessed in chapter four. Lastly, chapter five concludes the dissertation with the study results, implications for practice and future research, and final conclusions.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This dissertation is about the perceptions of elementary teachers and district administrators from a particular school district as it relates to the placements of African American males in special education programs. The topics discussed in this chapter pertain to the bodies of literature that were utilized to gain insight into the study's research questions. The literature that was reviewed included Achieving Equity in Special Education: History, Status, and Current Challenges (Skiba et al., 2008), The Trouble with Black Boys: And Other Reflections on Race, Equity, and the Future of Public Education ((Noguera, 2008), The Disproportionality of African Americans in Special Education (Lott-Daley, 2013), Culturally Responsive Classrooms: A Toolkit for Educators ((Bertani et al., 2010), Special Education and the Mis-education of African American Children: A Call to Action: A Position Paper for the Journal of Black Psychologists (Codrington & Fairchild, 2012), African American Student Representation in Special Education Programs (Kearns et al., 2005), The Continuum of "Troubling to "Troubled" Behavior: Exploratory Case Studies of African American Students in Programs for Emotional Disturbance (Hart et al., 2010), Special Education Disproportionality and the Influence of Intelligence Test Selection (Edwards, 2006), The G Factor: The Science of Mental Ability (Jensen, 1998), Validity of Psychological Assessment: Validation of Inferences from Persons' Responses and Performances as Scientific Inquiry into Score Meaning Mind in Society (Messick, 1995), Special Education Disproportionality and the Influence of Intelligence Test Selection (Edwards, 2006), International Guidelines for Test Use (International Test Commission, 2000), The Development of Higher Psychological Processes (Vygotsky, 1978), African American Male Students in PreK-12 Schools: Informing Research, Policy, and Practice (Lewis & Moore, 2014), Characteristics of U.S. Youths with Serious Emotional Disturbance: Data from the National Health Interview

Survey (Buck & Mark, 2006), Special Education Teacher Preparation in Classroom Management: Implications for Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (Oliver & Reschly, 2010), and PBIS Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (2007). The order of my presentation of those bodies of literature according to topic is as follows: testing procedures for special education services, the referral process, alternatives to inappropriate referrals, the role of school psychologists, psychological testing, cultural sensitivity training, IQ testing, Lev Vygotsky's Social Development Theory, stereotypes of African American males and their effects, the special education qualifying category of emotional disturbance, the behaviors of African American male students, and evidenced based intervention.

Referral, Placement, and Test Bias

Several procedural policies may be attributed to African American males being overrepresented within specific categories of special education. Three of the primary ones are cultural biases within the referral, placement, and testing procedures utilized within the public school system (Skiba et al., 2008).

Testing Bias

Studies have shown that intelligence tests and standardized tests of achievement are culturally biased toward African American male students (Skiba et al., 2008). Various concerns have been raised over the years regarding standardized tests of achievement being biased. "One of the concerns pertains to the item selection processes possibly being weighted differentially against minority test takers. Questions more frequently answered correctly by African American students than White students are rejected for inclusion at a higher frequency, because such items do not correlate with the knowledge base of the majority of the population" (Skiba et al., 2008, p.

271). This situation will continue for African Americans as long as their cultural experiences differ from the mainstream White American experiences. (Lott-Daley, 2013).

Language differences may also contribute to testing bias. Tests standardized for native English speakers are often inadvertently offered as English language proficiency tests. This language bias impacts many African Americans who do not speak standardized English within their home setting. Another factor to be considered is that standardized test performance may be impacted when an examiner is of a different cultural group than the examinee (Noguera, 2008). Cultural differences such as the examiner's perceptions and stereotypes about the examinee's cultural background can have a negative impact on their rapport with the student and their subsequent performance on the test. This is particularly true when the examinees are of a lower socioeconomic status (SES) or have a different racial background than the person offering the exam (Noguera, 2008).

Improving the Referral Process

Skiba et al. (2008) assert that

> Improving the referral process for students in general will not, in and of itself, guarantee an effect on the differential rates of special education referral for racially and ethnically diverse students. It is likely that more sophisticated research designs will demonstrate that racial disparities in special education eligibility and service are due to an interaction of student characteristics, teacher capabilities and attitudes, and unanalyzed sources of structural inequity and racial stereotype (pp. 281-282)

Moreover, they state that,

> The challenge in addressing the inequity in special education is to recognize the simultaneous contribution of those multiple sources, and to design interventions that can

> respond to the full complexity of the problem. Systemic strategies such as functional assessment and response-to-intervention models hold some promise for addressing general institutional issues that may well result in over identification of minority children and youth. However, it cannot be assumed that interventions that have been shown to work *on average* in improving educational outcomes will also be effective for groups that have been traditionally marginalized. (pp. 281-282).

And

> To ensure that the needs of those who are targeted in disproportionality interventions are met, it will be necessary to develop and implement approaches specifically designed to be *culturally responsive*. In this case, culturally responsive interventions might be defined as those that are not only intended to improve academic and behavioral outcomes in general, but are also specifically designed and evaluated in terms of their capability to reduce measured inequity. (Skiba et al., 2008, p. 281).

Alternatives to Inappropriate Referrals

"Biases toward African American male students are often created because of misconceptions. Educators must inform themselves of other cultures in order to be culturally responsive. The following interventions are designed and evaluated based on research that is related to best practices in instruction, educational leadership, academics, and behavioral problems for culturally responsive educators" (Bertani et al., 2010, p.41):

- Teacher Preparation: Specifically, raising the awareness of the potential for cultural mismatch. Cultural mismatch occurs when teachers lack the skills necessary to interact with students who are different than themselves or recognize these differences as okay.

- Improved Behavior Management: This intervention recognizes that the classroom structure and lack of effective behavior management may play a role in the overrepresentation of disciplinary actions in regard to African American male students.
- Family and Community Involvement: Enabling parent involvement allows educators to assess their own levels of cross-cultural competency as they engage in interactions with culturally diverse families (Bertani et al., 2010, p. 24).

Cultural biases pertaining to the referral, placement, and testing procedures utilized within the public school system have led to an overrepresentation of African American males within specific categories of special education. Within the special education field, school psychologists are the gatekeepers within the special education field. School psychologists are responsible for testing students referred for special education services and assisting IEP Team's in determining appropriate placement for students that qualify. The role of school psychologists must be examined further to help prevent the overrepresentation of African American males within specific categories of special education.

Role of School Psychologists

School psychologists have contributed to the overrepresentation of African American males in special education in many ways. School psychologists are professionally trained to provide mental health services that help students succeed academically, socially and emotionally (Codrington & Fairchild, 2012). School Psychologists are assigned with the task of linking mental health to learning and behavior. Their role is also to collaborate with parents, educators and other mental health service providers to help young students develop resiliency, confidence and self-esteem. A major part of the school psychologists' role is testing students for special

education placement. It consumes a large proportion of their time (Codrington & Fairchild, 2012).

Testing

The testing done by school psychologists is often viewed as being an objective procedure designed to eliminate bias. Nevertheless, school psychologists often make use of tests that are likely to produce the results they wish or they are expected to see (Skiba et al., 2008). Codrington and Fairchild say, "As with teachers, psychologists can suffer from inadequate training, cultural and class insensitivities, and bias. School psychologists are particularly challenged with inadequate tools (tests and measures) to assess culturally diverse students" (2012, p. 11). They continue, "This situation contributes to the overrepresentation of African American males in special education, a problem that has been identified as a critical issue for education reform for more than 50 years" (p. 12).

As with teachers, a new model of training for school psychologists is needed to reverse the deficit view of African American male students. School psychologists must develop cultural sensitivity in order to understand the unique needs of African American male students (Kearns, Ford, & Linney, 2005). Psychologists often view cultural differences among African American students as personal deficiencies. These misconceptions are supported by inadequate testing instruments and can influence determinations about the disabilities that students may have.

School psychologists must be trained in cultural responsiveness and ways to increase parental involvement in order to challenge the failures of the public school system (Kearns et al., 2005). They also need to be aware of multiple ways to explore problems within the school and classroom environments (Hart, Cramer, Harry, Klingner & Sturges, 2010). In order to help prevent the overrepresentation of African American male students in specific categories of

special education, the role of school psychologists must be expanded beyond the testing of an individual student's knowledge, skills, and abilities (Hart, Cramer, Harry, Klingner & Sturges, 2010).

School psychologists must also be aware of the biases associated with IQ tests (Edwards, 2006). Research indicates that testing bias cannot be solely attributed to mean differences in IQ between ethnic groups (Edwards, 2006). An adverse outcome associated with mean differences on an intelligence test is not considered bias. However, adverse outcomes that result from the selection of a specific intelligence test over another, when both are statistically sound, seem unfair. When examiners are not provided with information beforehand regarding the score results of ethnic groups on intelligence tests, their selection of an intelligence test can lead to avoidable consequences for the lower scoring groups (Jensen 1998).

To illustrate this point, Jensen (1998) reported findings of a meta-analysis that revealed that a mean IQ range of 10-20 points between ethnic groups on different intelligence tests. On one test, the mean difference may be 10 points, while on another test it may be 20 points. Tests with larger mean IQ differences between ethnic groups are likely to result in greater disproportional representation and adverse effects than tests with smaller mean score differences. These adverse effects can include restrictive educational opportunities, limited expectations, and stereotyping for some students. For tests to be free of bias, examiners need to interpret them not only from a numerical standpoint, but also in regard to the consequences of test score use (Messick, 1995), including their influence on disproportionate placement in special education programs. National and international standards for testing support the consideration of mean IQ differences in test selection (Edwards, 2006; International Test Commission, 2000). It is important for school psychologists to remember that the standardized test which is most likely to

help reduce disproportionality in special education is the test that results in a smaller mean score difference between ethnic groups.

Codrington and Fairchild assert that "Training school psychologists on non-biased tests can help prevent misdiagnoses based on cultural misunderstandings. African American male representation in special education has been found to be proportional when the placement was based on measures that were non-discriminatory" (2012, p. 18). Thus, eliminating test bias is a key strategy for reducing the overrepresentation of African American males in special education.

The Socialization of African American Males in the Educational Setting

Lev Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory is useful in understanding the socialization of African American students within the educational setting in the United States. This theory suggested that a close relationship exists between social interaction and a person's cognitive development. Vygotsky suggested that a child's cognitive development depends on a child's social surroundings (Vygotsky, 1978). He claimed that when children are surrounded by competent peers and adults with whom they interact in positive ways, their cognitive development increases (Vygotsky, 1978). Based on Vygotsky's social development theory, the cognitive development of African American male students is influenced largely by their social surroundings (Vygotsky, 1978). In the case of African American males, the socio-cultural context of schooling often has a negative impact on their cognitive development due to cultural misunderstanding, stereotypes, and unequal opportunity within the educational system (Noguera, 2008).

Educators are aware of common cultural myths and stereotypes about African American males. Awareness of these negative messages about African American males can influence

educators' interactions with, reactions, and interpretations of behavior. These biases may play themselves out within the school setting and leave African American male students as the subject of their teachers' pessimistic views (Noguera, 2008). The academic experience of African American male students can be a negative one if their teachers' beliefs about them are centered on stereotypes. This situation increases the likelihood of African American male students being referred for special education services (Lewis & Moore, 2014). Thus, it is important that teachers create an engaging learning environment and realize that their actions may influence the academic trajectory of their African American male students (Lewis & Moore, 2014).

Emotional Disturbance

The special education qualifying label of emotional disturbance is one under which African American males are overrepresented (Buck & Mark, 2006). African American males were statistically over represented within this category in a study of the public school system during 2012 as 16.6 % of the students in the nation's public schools were African American and 28 % of the students labeled to have emotional disturbance were African American (National Association for the Education of African American Children with Learning Differences, 2012). Codrington and Fairchild say, "African American students in general were also listed as being 2.28 times more likely to receive special education services under the qualifying category of emotional disturbance than same-age students of all other racial/ethnic groups *combined*" (2012, p. 3).

Behavioral Problems

African American male students who perform low academically are at a greater risk for behavioral problems. They may exhibit inappropriate behaviors in an attempt to receive a disciplinary action from their teacher. Some studies suggest that this behavior is exhibited

intentionally to avoid having to complete difficult academic tasks. In actuality, both the teacher and student are exhibiting task avoidance in this scenario since the student is able to avoid an academic task and the teacher is able to remove a disruptive student from their classroom (Corington & Fairchild, 2012; Oliver & Reschly, 2010). Due to the challenging behaviors exhibited by students with emotional disturbance, educators must develop skills in the areas of behavior management and classroom organization. These skills are necessary in order to reduce the overrepresentation of African American male students in specific categories of special education (Oliver & Reschly, 2010).

Evidenced Based Intervention

Evidence-based interventions such as RTI and PBIS are treatments that have been proven to have successful outcomes. Evidence-based interventions are treatments that offer differentiated instruction and increase the likelihood of changing target behaviors if implemented with integrity (PBIS Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, 2007).

Response to Intervention (RTI) arose from efforts to improve the identification practices involved in special education. It is a process that involves documenting the performance of students as evidence of the need for additional services after changes have been made within classroom instruction. The goal of RTI is to improve the way schools support students with learning and behavior problems by systematically delivering a variety of interventions based on demonstrated levels of need (PBIS Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, 2007).

Response to Intervention (RTI) is the practice of providing high quality instruction and interventions aligned to student need, frequently monitoring progress to inform decisions about changes in instruction or goals, and applying data to important educational decisions (Batsche, et. al., 2005). RTI takes environmental factors into consideration as they might apply to an

individual student's difficulty, and provides services/intervention as soon as the student demonstrates a need. With a primary focus on academics, RTI provides a way to assess both disability identification and early intervention assistance for the "most vulnerable, academically unresponsive children" in schools and school districts (PBIS Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, 2007).

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is based on a problem solving model and its purpose is to prevent inappropriate student behavior by modeling and reinforcing appropriate behaviors (PBIS Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, 2007). Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) is a process that is similar to RTI. PBIS offers several interventions that are utilized based on a students demonstrated level of need, and addresses the role of the environment as it relates to the development and improvement of behavior problems. The term PBIS derives from the 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). PBIS is often referred to as SWPBS, which is short for "School-wide Positive Behavior Supports." PBIS is based on principles of applied behavior analysis, prevention science, implementation science, and values of positive behavior support. PBIS is a framework or approach for assisting school personnel in adopting and organizing evidence based behavioral interventions into an integrated continuum that enhances academic and social behavior outcomes for all students. It is not a packaged curriculum, scripted intervention, or strategy. PBIS provides a way for school personnel to (a) organize evidence-based practices, (b) improve their implementation of those practices, (c) use data to guide decision making, and (d) maximize academic and social behavior outcomes for students. PBIS supports the success of all students, particularly students with behavior risk and with disabilities. The overall goal of PBIS is establish and maintain effective teaching and learning environments

that have a common (a) vision and outcome, (b) language, and (c) experience or routine (PBIS Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, 2007).

Conclusion

Several interviews and surveys were conducted with elementary teachers and district administrators for this dissertation study. The study's focus on the perceptions of elementary teachers and district administrators regarding the placement of African American males in special education programs was centered on Lev Vygostky's social development theory. This theory provided a framework and a lens through which to consider the issue of the overrepresentation of African American males in specific categories of special education. Vygotsky's social development theory suggests that a close relationship exists between social interaction and one's cognitive development, particularly in childhood (Vygotsky, 1978). This framework was used to examine how the cognitive development of African American male students is largely influenced by their social surroundings.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

The chapter will describe the purpose of the study, research design, sampling and population, data collection, instrumentation, and data analysis process. The purpose of this study is to investigate the thoughts of teachers and administrators from a select school district on what types of measures could potentially prevent the overrepresentation of African American male students in special education. This study will utilize interviews and surveys with teachers and administrative staff within the special education field to determine African American males' eligibility for special education, particularly in the "soft" categories.

The research questions for this study were written in an effort to guide the direction of the study and provide guidance for future research within the field of special education.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. What do teachers and administrators perceive to be the early intervention measures in school policies and procedures that should be used by a school or school district to prevent the overrepresentation of African American males in special education?
2. What do teachers and administrators perceive to be the types of professional development for instruction that should help in preventing overrepresentation of African American males in special education?
3. What do teachers and administrators perceive to be the changes that should be made to federal, state, and district policies to prevent the overrepresentation of African American males in special education?

Research Design

This was a qualitative case study designed to explore the overrepresentation of African American males within special education. A qualitative research study strives to focus on meaning, understanding, process, and is grounded in collecting data in the field where the phenomenon emerges. According to John Creswell (2009), the qualitative method uses inductive analysis from the bottom up to create an organized set of themes. The goal of a qualitative study is to discover and describe a phenomenon (Merriam, 2009).

Creswell states, "The purpose of qualitative research is to select the participants and sites that will provide the most assistance in exploring the problem and research questions" (2009, p. 178). This study focused on the perceptions of elementary teachers and district administrators regarding the placement of African American males in special education programs. The sample group consisted of one elementary general education teacher, two elementary special education teachers, an elementary school principal, an elementary school program specialist, and the district's special education director. The study was designed in this manner in order to gain insight from the district personnel who have the most intimate knowledge on the problem. By selecting this sample group, I was able to study the problem of the overrepresentation of African American males in special education from both a classroom and administrative perspective. This allowed me to gather data on why there is an overrepresentation of African American males being referred for special education services.

Interviewees were contacted through the assistance of the Director of Special Education within the school district. A short printed description of the study and request for participation was given to the interviewees as well as a consent form. For the survey, participants were contacted through the assistance of the Special Education Director. An email was sent to the

potential survey participants requesting their participation in the survey. A brief description of the survey was attached to the email asking them to respond by filling out the survey before a specific deadline date. For slow responders, a reminder email was sent out at a later time. Each interview and survey participant was given a $5 gift certificate to Starbucks in appreciation for their participation after the study.

Research Population

During the 2015-2016 school year, 361,752 out of 6,226,737 total students (5.8%) were African American (Statewide Enrollment by Ethnicity, 2016). 64,005 of the African American students within the state of California were provided special education services according to the California Department of Education's reporting cycle in December of 2014. (Special Education Enrollment by Ethnicity and Disability Statewide Report, 2016).

Within Los Angeles County, there were 119,174 out of 1,523,212 total students (7.8%) that were African American during the 2015-2016 school year. 20,824 of the African American students within Los Angeles County were provided special education services according to the California Department of Education's reporting cycle in December of 2014 (Special Education Enrollment by Ethnicity and Disability 19 Los Angeles County, 2016).

In order to conduct the necessary research for the case study, I analyzed a suburban public school district in Los Angeles County that consists of 17 elementary schools, eight middle schools, four high schools, one continuation high school, one alternative high school, and three adult school campuses. Within the district selected for the study, there was an African American population consisting of 918 out of 23,885 total students (3.8%) during the 2015-2016 school year (Enrollment by Ethnicity for 2015-2016 District and School Enrollment by Ethnicity, 2016). 141 of the African American students within this school district were provided special education

services according to the California Department of Education's reporting cycle in December of 2014 (Special Education Enrollment by Ethnicity and Disability 1965060--Torrance Unified, 2016).

African American students represent about 16.6% of the students within the nation's public school system but represent more than 30% of the students in special education (National Association for the Education of African American Children with Learning Differences, 2012). This situation is not reflective of the public school system within the district utilized for the study, Los Angeles County, or for the state of California. However, the statistical information derived from the California Department of Education's website still points to an overrepresentation of African Americans within special education and the fact that most African Americans do not live in California should be taken into consideration. While 13.3% of the people living within the United States are African American, the same can be said for only 6.5% of California's residents (United States Census Bureau, 2016).

Research Sample

Purposeful sampling was used for this study. The sample group consisted of six educators from the district used for the study. This sample group consisted of three elementary teachers and 3 administrators. The elementary teachers selected to participate in the interview portion of the study worked at an elementary school in the district that offers special education services to qualifying students. This school site was selected by the district's director of special education for the study. During the 2015-2016 school year, 16 out of the 587 total students (2.7%) attending this elementary school were African American (Enrollment by Ethnicity for 2015-2016 District and School Enrollment by Ethnicity, 2016). Studying this school allowed me to analyze a portion of the district's special education based student population and ensured the results of

the study were valid. The general education elementary school teacher selected for the interview was a teacher who had previously referred an African American student for special education services in one of the categories in which there is an overrepresentation of African American males. The special education elementary school teachers selected for the interview were teachers of African American male students also listed under one of the overrepresented qualifying categories of special education. The elementary program specialist was someone who was very familiar with the process of assigning an African American male to special education in one of the categories overrepresented by African American males. The program specialist, director of special education, and principal are district leaders and offered perspective on the overrepresentation of African American males from an administrative standpoint. These participants together provided a comprehensive perspective on how and why African American male students are referred for special education services and offered insights about the cause of the overrepresentation of African American males under certain qualifying categories. The interviews for the teachers and principal were designed to be conducted privately and took place during after school hours at their respective school sites for a period of time no longer than one hour. The interviews with the program specialist and director of special education were designed to be conducted privately at the district office and last no longer than one hour.

Interviews

In all forms of qualitative research, some and occasionally all of the data are collected through interviews. An interview is a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a discussion that is centered on questions pertaining to a research study (Merriam, 2009). Interviewing helps researchers find out things that cannot be directly observed such as feelings,

thoughts, and intentions. Interviewing also allows researchers to find out information regarding events form the past that cannot be replicated (Merriam, 2009).

Within this study, each of the six interview participants was interviewed to gather information on the problem area. The protocol for the interview was similar for all six participants (see Appendix A). Each participant was to be interviewed once either within their classroom or office for no longer than 60 minutes. The interviews were to be audio recorded and notes were to be taken to code the data for common themes.

Demographic Data for Interviews

Here is a table comprised of data on the six interview participants based on their years of experience working with students with special needs and their level of education:

Table 1.

Interview Participant Information

INTERVIEW INFORMATION	Role	Years of Experience (working with students with special needs)	Level of Education	Gender	Ethnicity
Participant 1	SPED Teacher	34	M.A.	Female	White
Participant 2	SPED Teacher	1	M.A.	Female	White
Participant 3	General Ed Teacher	10	B.A.	Female	White
Participant 4	Principal	11	J.D.	Female	White
Participant 5	SPED Program Specialist	20	Ed.D.	Female	African American
Participant 6	SPED Director	26	M.A.	Female	White

Interestingly, all but one of the interview participants had at least 10 years of experience within the education profession. The administrators that were interviewed all had over 20 years of experience. One teacher had 34 years of experience. The administrators (principal, program specialist, and special education director) had an average of 22 years of experience. This result was important because it indicated, on average, that the administrators that were interviewed had taken their positions during the era of high stakes accountability for student achievement as introduced through No Child Left Behind.

Surveys

The protocol for the survey consisted of emailing a survey pertaining to the overrepresentation of African American males in certain categories of special education (see Appendix B). The survey was emailed to 25 participants within the district (19 educational professionals within the district in addition to the six original educational professionals that were interviewed). The survey was designed to take no longer than 60 minutes to complete and submitted to participants through *Google Forms* (an online based survey tool) once they completed it. I then reviewed the data from the survey and look for common themes, trends or patterns. My aim as the researcher was to have a response rate of 40% or greater based on the average rate for a survey conducted through email (Dillman, 2007).

Demographic Data for Surveys

Of the 25 potential survey participants, 16 elected to participate in the survey. This yielded a response rate of 64% of educators. This result met the goal of the researcher based on the average rate for a survey conducted through email since there was a response rate of 40% or greater (Dillman, 2007). Of the six educators who participated in the interview, five agreed to participate in the survey (the elementary school principal that was interviewed chose not to

participate in the survey). The other 19 educators that the survey was distributed to were special education based elementary teachers (11 of these educators participated in the survey).

Here is demographic data on the 16 survey participants based on their gender, ethnic background, years of experience working with students with special needs and their level of education:

Table 2.

Survey Participant Information

SURVEY INFORMATION	Role	Years of Experience (working with students with special needs)	Level of Education	Gender	Ethnicity
Participant 1	SPED Teacher	34	M.A.	Female	White
Participant 2	SPED Teacher	1	M.A.	Female	White
Participant 3	General Ed Teacher	10	B.A.	Female	White
Participant 4	SPED Program Specialist	20	Ed.D.	Female	African American
Participant 5	SPED Director	26	M.A.	Female	White
Participant 6	SPED Teacher			Female	African American
Participant 7	SPED Teacher			Female	White
Participant 8	SPED Teacher			Female	White
Participant 9	SPED Teacher			Female	White
Participant 10	SPED Teacher			Female	Hispanic

Participant 11	SPED Teacher			Female	White
Participant 12	SPED Teacher			Female	White
Participant 13	SPED Teacher			Male	Asian
Participant 14	SPED Teacher			Female	White
Participant 15	SPED Teacher			Female	Asian
Participant 16	SPED Teacher			Female	Asian

This table displays the gender of the 16 educators who participated in the survey (all of the interview participants were female). Of the 16 educators that responded to the online survey, 93.75% were female and 6.25% were male. Research done on the racial/ethnicity of teachers in the United States indicated that 84% of the K-12 teaching force is White and female. The immediate future will likely not be different as the majority of all current teacher education students are White females (Feistritzer, 2011).

The ethnic breakdown of the 16 educators that participated in the online based survey was also listed. Of the educators surveyed, 62.5% were White, 18.75% were Asian, 12.5% were African American, and 6.25% were Hispanic. Since the focus of this study was on educators working within a school district in Los Angeles County, the selection criteria may have influenced the ethnic distribution of educators and altered the number of non-White educators in the sample upward from the overall national trend.

Access/Entry

The initial point of contact for this study was the director of special education. A letter was sent to the director of special education inviting them to participate in the study. The letter

explained the purpose & nature of the study, confidentially, procedures, and educational affiliation of the researcher.

Phone based conversations were to be conducted with the director of special education to clearly define the research process for the study and in order to set up a meeting in person. At the meeting, both verbal and written consent were to be obtained from the director of special education.

The director of special education was unavailable to meet in person or speak over the phone but answered my interview questions through email and completed the online based survey. The director of special education also referred me to the appropriate staff to complete the interview and survey segments of my study. Based on the information I received from the director of special education, I contacted the elementary program specialist by phone to set up a meeting time in which I could obtain their written consent and assure them of confidentiality in the study before conducting their interview.

The elementary school principal was also contacted in advance in order for the interview involving them and the elementary based teachers to take place at their school site. I also talked to both the principal and the three teachers over the phone in order to obtain their verbal consent and set up a time to visit them at their school site. The interview with the elementary school principal took place in their office and the interviews with the elementary teachers (one general education and two special education teachers) took place in their classrooms. I also obtained written consent from the principals and teachers in person to assure them of confidentiality in the study.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

During the course of the study, data collection instruments were developed in order to answer the research questions. Interview questions and survey protocol were developed in an effort to accomplish this goal. The interview protocol for the study consisted of a basic document that explained the purpose & nature of the study, confidentially, procedures, and educational affiliation of the researcher.

The research questions were designed to obtain insightful and thought provoking answers from professionals within the special education field. Various questions were asked to the administrators, program specialists, and teachers depending on their roles within the district. Limitations were applicable to the interview format since the researcher's presence may have biased the responses and not all participants are equally communicative.

The data collection process took place within the district during the 2015-2016 school year and were conducted at times that were convenient for the study's participants. The data collection instruments that were used during the study included interviews and surveys with both teachers and administrators. By incorporating a variety of data collection strategies and research methods, one school district's policies and practices were examined in order to increase understanding of why there is an overrepresentation of African American males within special education and how this situation can be changed in the future because of its detrimental effect on society.

The interview protocol for the study was geared to be highly structured. Having a highly structured interview protocol allowed the researcher to gain as much information as possible in a short amount of time on the perceptions of elementary teachers and district administrators regarding the placement of African American males in special education programs.

Data Analysis

The thematic approach was applied when I analyzed the data collected from the interviews and surveys used for the study. Thematic analysis is a systematic approach to the analysis of qualitative data that involves identifying themes; coding and classifying data, and interpreting the results. Thematic analysis is not particular to any one research method but is used by scholars across many fields and disciplines (Glesne & Peshkin, 2011).

I provided an account of the settings where the study took place and how data was collected. Creswell's (2009) six steps of data analysis provided a guideline on how to make sense of the data collected. Each of the steps is necessary in order to sort through the gathered information and discover the findings of the study.

Creswell (2009) states that,

> The first step is the organization and preparation of the data. A wide assortment of activities is necessary in order to transform the raw data into information that is logical and reviewable. The second step consists of examining all of the data to gain a holistic view and start to make overall reflections of the information that has been collected. The third step consists of an in depth examination of the data. Data was separated into broad areas that are given a common title. The literature review was helpful in establishing categories and themes from the data that has been collected. Data was collected and analyzed from the document reviews, interviews, and observations. The coded information of the collected data was then used for step four. The fourth step consists of describing the events, people, and setting of the school sites utilized in the study. This in turn provided the reader with a description of the study as a whole and a way to understand the coded themes used to navigate through the data collected. Every one of

> the themes utilized in the study was supported by contextual evidence that was triangulated with the raw data across the multiple collection methods. The fifth step consists of summarizing the identified themes in narrative form for the reader. This provided a clearer conceptualization on how the themes are connected and how conclusions were drawn. The sixth step of Creswell's process consists of making meaning and interpreting the data. I was to explain the new knowledge gained from the study, how the findings compared to previous studies that were similar, and how the information can influence future research in the area. (pp. 185-189)

Credibility and Trustworthiness and Validity and Reliability

Using various methods to collect data allows for data to be triangulated. I triangulated the data sources in order to ensure the findings that emerged were consistent across voices and sources. I used multiple data types and sources during the triangulation process. This consisted of interviews and surveys with both teachers and administrators (Creswell, 2009). The collective data was used to answer the study's three research questions. During the interview process, I asked questions from a non-biased perspective and tried to stay aware of reactions & subtle hints or implied meanings so that I could take notes while listening to the people I interviewed. I have a deep passion for students with special needs so I gave my best effort to not be overtly critical of people based on my own perspective. In addition to this, I utilized a recorder since I could not possibly memorize all that was mentioned during the interview process. The coding process was time consuming and required that I maintained my train of thought. I had to analyze what I wrote in order to understand common themes and label them as necessary. In the end, I was able to look at my findings and conceptualize underlying themes through the triangulation process (Merriam, 2009).

Limitations and Delimitations

My dissertation study had limitations and delimitations. This study was conducted in accordance with the USC Rossier School of Education for students aspiring to obtain a terminal degree. This study was completed through the use of current literature pertaining to the overrepresentation of African American males in special education, followed by conducting a qualitative study designed for collecting and analyzing data in relation to the research questions. The school district selected for this study is one that I am familiar with and one that I had a keen interest in researching based on my work experience within the field of special education. Financial and time constraints prevented the study from taking place on a national scale or over a lengthy period of time. This study was based on research gathered through discussions & surveys with professional educators working within the field of special education in Los Angeles County. Additionally, I did not account for my own biases by taking reflective notes during the data collection or analysis phase.

Conclusion

The purpose of chapter three was to describe the study, research questions, and rationale for the research design. Chapter three provided background information on the study as it pertains to the research population & sampling, data collection, instrumentation, and overall process used for the data analysis. Chapter four includes an analysis and discussion of the data collected in addition to any key findings. Chapter five consists of a summarization of the findings along with recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS AND RESULTS

This chapter presents an analysis of the data collection from a study that sought to identify stakeholders' perceptions regarding the Placement of African American males in special education programs. The questions answered by the data were as follows:

1. What do teachers and administrators perceive to be the early intervention measures in school policies and procedures that should be used by a school or school district to prevent the overrepresentation of African American males in special education?
2. What do teachers and administrators perceive to be the types of professional development for instruction that should help in preventing overrepresentation of African American males in special education?
3. What do teachers and administrators perceive to be the changes that should be made to federal, state and district policies to prevent the overrepresentation of African American males in special education?

Findings and results from the interviews and surveys are organized by research question. This chapter will present each research question, followed by related themes that answer the research question, supported by specific findings.

Research Question One: What do Teachers and Administrators Perceive to be the Early Intervention Measures in School Policies and Procedures that should be used by a School or School District to Prevent the Overrepresentation of African American Males in Special Education?

Research question one investigates the views of the educators and educational administrators on early intervention measures within the school district to prevent the overrepresentation of African American males in special education.

Based on the research question, several themes identified early intervention measures from the data sources.

Four themes emerged from the analysis of the data sources. These themes were as follows:

1. Teaching to multiple learning modalities (Auditory, Visual, Kinesthetic, Tactile, etc.)
2. Evidenced based intervention such as Response to Intervention and Positive Behavior Intervention that offer strategies for behavior improvement as well as academic strategies for reading, language arts, and math.
3. Modeling the patience and understanding with the learning process that educators would like children to model in social interactions.
4. Helping parents/guardians to better understand The Parents' Rights & Procedural Safeguards as they discuss the evaluation process for special education and stating that testing and Evaluation materials and procedures will be selected and administered so as not to be racially, culturally, or sexually discriminatory. No

> single procedure shall be the sole criterion for determining an appropriate educational program for a child.

I will address each of these themes below.

Teaching to Multiple Modalities

Teachers, administrators and staff consistently indicated that one approach to reducing overinclusion in special education was to teach students using different learning modalities. Teaching to different learning modalities refers to the practice of teaching students with various types of learning modalities. Learning modalities refer to how students use their senses in the learning process. There are four modalities of learning that are most often considered. They are auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, and visual (Powell, 2013).

Of the six people interviewed, two indicated that teaching to multiple modalities is an important early intervention mechanism that should be used by schools and school personnel to prevent the over identification of African American male students into specific categories of special education. This is 33% of the total number of people interviewed. One of the special education teachers interviewed stated that

> Teachers have a tendency to kind of teach one modality and you especially see that in the upper grades where they do a lot of lecturing. They need to remember that not all their children are auditory learners, not all their children are visual learners. They need to learn ways to incorporate within their lessons more ways to use those modalities to reach all of the students and to reach the students with as many modalities as possible to ensure that retention of what they're saying is going to happen. They don't it. We all fall prey to what's easiest."

Here, this special education teacher noted that teachers make the mistake of not realizing their students have different learning modalities and that they (teachers) need to use different strategies to ensure that they are meeting the differing needs of their students.

Similarly, the program specialist alluded to how teaching multiple modalities can help in providing reading instruction "Teachers are used to guided reading with the visual and verbal stimuli approaches, but what about the tactile or kinesthetic sensory input that could help? That's what the research says helps struggling readers." Here again, the insight is that teachers are not doing what is necessary for the learning styles of all students and instead, they default to traditional and less successful strategies that leave their students without sufficient support.

Of the 16 people who completed the survey, a total of eight people (50%) indirectly indicated that differentiation of instruction was important to meet the needs of special education student (African American). While they were not asked directly about the use of multiple modalities of learning, a question in the survey asked participants to place a check by any of the quality indicators below that you have used or have seen in practice in your school district. These eight people placed a check next to differentiated instruction to address the specific needs of students. Differentiated instruction includes using strategies that meet the different needs of students who learn using different modalities. Therefore, their responses suggest some level of recognition that the strategies they used or should be used would meet the various needs of students who learn in different ways.

Evidenced Based Intervention

Teachers, administrators, and staff indicated that evidenced based intervention measures that could be useful in preventing the overrepresentation of African American males in specific categories of special education.

Of the six people interviewed, four indicated that evidenced based intervention is an important early intervention mechanism that should be used by schools and school personnel to prevent the over identification of African American male students into specific categories of special education. This was 66% of the total number of people interviewed. The director of special education expressed that one of the ways to help prevent the overrepresentation of African American males in specific categories of special education was by, "Putting general education interventions such as RTI (Response to Intervention) into place over time instead of looking for an "immediate fix" by dumping a child into special education to get out of the general education classroom"

The general education teacher that was interviewed felt that intervention strategies are important because it allows educators to know the students and their needs and strengths. Here, the director of special education and general education teacher noted that early intervention measures should be utilized over an extended amount of time with struggling African American male students rather than immediately referring them for special educations services. Similarly, the general education teacher discussed the benefit of early invention measures being beneficial. The general education teacher felt that early intervention measures teachers to become more familiar with their students' areas of need and strength.

Of the 16 people who completed the survey, seven people (nearly 44%) indirectly indicated that evidenced based interventions are important and should be used by schools and school personnel to prevent the over identification of African American male students into specific categories of special education. While they were note asked directly about early intervention measures, question #17 in the survey asked participants if there are any specific quality indicators that you plan to implement in your school district or classroom. Some of the

responses to this question in the survey made reference to early intervention measures such as RTI and PBIS. The program specialist answered the 17th survey question (see Appendix C) in part by saying that she was planning to have continued collaboration with the district's RTI Team to help implement the RTI model at all of its schools. One of the elementary special education teachers answered the 17th survey question by stating that she was planning to implement Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies in her classroom to prevent the overrepresentation of African American males in specific categories of special education. This would include having behavior expectations for all, consistent positive behavior consequences, and consistent delivery of positive consequences by all staff.

Modeling Patience and Understanding

Teachers, administrators, and staff consistently indicated that modeling patience and understanding to their students is an important aspect in prevent the overrepresentation of African American male students in specific categories of special education.

Of the six people interviewed, four people (66%) indicated that modeling patience was an important early intervention mechanism that should be used by schools and school personnel to prevent the over identification of African American male students into specific categories of special education. The special education director that was interviewed expressed that educators should remember to "Model the patience with the learning process that we would like children to model in social interactions."

When asked about teaching strategies that could be implemented to help educators work with children who learn "differently" instead of referring them to special education, the director of special education discussed the importance of modeling the patience with the learning process that we would like children to model in social interactions. The principal who was interviewed

stated that "Opening up people's minds and understandings of differences, intelligence, and success would help eliminate race and culture as factors leading the overrepresentation of African American males in special education." Here the principal was stating that open minded and culturally sensitive educators are an important aspect in helping to prevent African American male students from being referred for special education. The program specialist elaborated on this situation by saying "People's perceptions and lack of understanding prevents testing for special education disabilities being free of bias."

Similarly, one of the special education teachers that was interviewed stated, "The overrepresentation of African American males in special education takes place because of a lack of understanding of different intelligences and that teachers should try to get to know each individual student."

Of the 16 people who completed the survey, 14 (nearly 88%) indicated that the act of modeling patience and understanding can be used by schools and school personnel to prevent the over identification of African American male students into specific categories of special education. Question #12 of the survey asked for participants to place a check by any quality indicators that they have used or seen in practice within the school district. The 14 respondents conveyed their beliefs about patience and understanding by checking off certain answers to this question. Their answers included: school staff discusses students' culture and conducts systematic analysis of its impact on school performance, the systematic analysis of the student's culture and potential impact on behavior include staff discussions with the family about home expectations and behavior management practices and staff self-assessments of their own cultural expectations and practices, and classroom rules and procedures are accommodating to diverse student learning styles, (all styles are actively involved in instruction and other classroom

activities to the extent possible, understanding of all types of knowledge valued by students' parents/families).

Helping Parents/Guardians

Teachers, administrators, and staff consistently indicated that it is important to educate parents and guardians in regard to their educational rights and helping them to have increased awareness of their child's disabilities and/or educational needs as well as community resources.

Of the six people interviewed, two people (33%) indicated that helping parents/guardians is an important early intervention mechanism that should be used by schools and school personnel to prevent the over identification of African American male students into specific categories of special education. The director of special education expressed that, "Parent involvement affected how children were perceived and that African American parents were perceived at times as being disinterested or not knowledgeable about their child's disabilities and/or educational needs." Here, the director of special education stated that African American parents were often perceived by school districts as being unaware of special education protocol as it related to their child's learning needs. Similarly, the program specialist discussed the need for a consistent male presence could help prevent the overrepresentation of African American male students in specific categories of special education. The program specialist provided an example of how she once referred an African American male student's mother to a mentoring group so that the student could have a consistent African American male role model in his life. The program specialist also felt that the school district needed to provide support to this student since the absence of his father at home was impacting his overall learning process at school.

Of the 16 people who completed the survey, 11 (nearly 69%) indicated that helping parents/guardians is important and should be used by schools and school personnel to prevent the

over identification of African American male students into specific categories of special education. The director of special education answered question # 18 (Create a 3-5 step action plan for implementing one or more of the quality indicators from question #17) by stating that in order to prevent the overrepresentation of African American males in special education, top level leadership in the district needs to acknowledge the need for systemic change. Cultural sensitivity training would be the first step in this process since the district operates from a top-down management structure. Parents/guardian involvement was essential in this process as they were the stakeholders who would ascertain where the systemic change was authentic.

Conclusion

Research question one delved into the various types of early intervention measures pertaining to school policies and procedures that can potentially prevent the overrepresentation of African American males in specific categories of special education (emotional disturbance, intellectual disturbance, and specific learning disability). Several themes emerged from the data collected on this research question. The data collected identified that the following items are necessary at the school and school district level: Teaching to multiple learning modalities (Auditory, Kinesthetic, Tactile, Visual, etc.), evidenced based intervention such as Response to Intervention and Positive Behavior Intervention that offer strategies for behavior improvement as well as academic strategies for reading, language arts, and math, teacher modeling the patience with the learning process that educators would like children to model in social interactions, and assistance being offered to parents/guardians in order to help them better understand The Parents' Rights & Procedural Safeguards as they discuss the evaluation process for special education.

Research Question Two: What do Teachers and Administrators Perceive to Be the Types of Professional Development for Instruction that Should Help in Preventing Overrepresentation of African American Males in Special Education?

Research question two focuses on the types of professional development for instruction that can benefit teachers and administrators in preventing the overrepresentation of African American males in special education. Based on the research question, several examples of professional development for instruction derived from themes collected from the data sources.

The themes included:

1. Professional development for teachers and site administrators in understanding multiple learning modalities
2. Training on cultural sensitivity
3. Changing the identification process for the qualifiers of emotional disturbance, intellectual disability, and specific learning disability

This section will describe the common themes that emerged from question two.

Professional Development for Teachers and Site Administrators in Understanding Multiple Learning Modalities

Of the six people interviewed, two people (33%) indicated that professional development instruction pertaining to teaching to multiple modalities could help prevent the over identification of African American male students into specific categories of special education. One of the special education teachers interviewed stated that:

> Teachers have a tendency to kind of teach one modality and you especially see that in the upper grades where they do a lot of lecturing. They need to remember that not all their children are auditory learners, not all their children are visual learners. They need to learn

> ways to incorporate within their lessons more ways to use those modalities to reach all of the students and to reach the students with as many modalities as possible to ensure that retention of what they're saying is going to happen. They don't it. We all fall prey to what's easiest."

The program specialist alluded to how teaching multiple modalities can help in providing reading instruction "Teachers are used to guided reading with the visual and verbal stimuli approaches, but what about the tactile or kinesthetic sensory input that could help? That's what the research says helps struggling readers."

Of the 16 people who completed the survey, eight people (50%) indirectly indicated that differentiation of instruction was important to meet the needs of special education student (African American). Differentiated instruction includes using strategies that meet the different needs of students who learn using different modalities. Therefore, their responses suggest some level of recognition that the strategies they used or should be used would meet the various needs of students who learn in different ways. When participants were asked in the survey to question in the survey to place a check by any of the quality indicators below that they have used or have seen in practice in their school district, these eight people placed a check next to "Differentiated Instruction to address the specific needs of students."

Training on Cultural Sensitivity

Of the six people interviewed, four (66%) indicated that professional development instruction geared to increase cultural sensitivity could be useful in preventing the over identification of African American male students into specific categories of special education. The director of special education stated that the superintendent drove the culture of the district.

Of the 16 people who were surveyed, six people (nearly 38%) indirectly indicated that professional development instruction geared to increase cultural sensitivity can be useful in preventing the over identification of African American male students into specific categories of special education.

Changing the Identification Process for the Qualifiers of Emotional Disturbance, Intellectual Disability, and Specific Learning Disability. Of the six people interviewed, three people (50%) indicated that professional development instruction geared to changing the identification process for the qualifiers of emotional disturbance, intellectual disability, and specific learning disability would be useful in preventing the over identification of African American male students into specific categories of special education. The director of special education addressed how there had been data collected by the OCR (Office of Civil Rights) regarding the over identification of Latino and African American students as emotionally disturbed during the years of 2007, 2011, and 2015. One of the special education teachers who was interviewed expressed that she has more male students than female students and that children with behavior issues tend to get referred for special education services whether or not there are academic issues.

Of the 16 people who were surveyed, 3 people (nearly 19%) indirectly indicated that professional development instruction geared to increase cultural sensitivity can be useful in preventing the over identification of African American male students into specific categories of special education.

Conclusion

Research question two was centered on examples of professional development for instruction that can benefit teachers and administrators in preventing the overrepresentation of African American males in special education. Several themes emerged from the data collected on this research question. The data collected identified that the following items are necessary as the school and school district level: Professional development for teachers and site administrators in understanding multiple learning modalities, training on cultural sensitivity, and changing the identification process for the qualifiers of emotional disturbance, intellectual disability, and specific learning disability.

Research Question Three: What do teachers and administrators perceive to be the changes that should be made to federal, state, and district policies to prevent the overrepresentation of African American males in special education?

Research question three explores the changes that can be made to federal, state, and district policies in order to prevent the overrepresentation of African American males in special education. Based on the research question, certain themes regarding policy changes derived from the data sources.

The themes included:

1. The use of unbiased assessments
2. Systemic change in special education

This section will describe the common themes that emerged from question three.

The Use of Unbiased Assessments

Of the six people interviewed, two people (33%) indicated that the use of unbiased assessments could help prevent the over identification of African American male students into

specific categories of special education. The principal stated that tests need to be as unbiased as possible to make the process of placing African American students in special education programs more fair and accurate. The program specialist recommended the use of alternative assessments procedures to eliminate bias. She explained that some district members look at each child individually and have high expectations for their student achievement while others have biased, unrealistic, low expectations for certain students.

Of the 16 people who completed the survey, three (nearly 19%) indirectly indicated that the use of unbiased assessments could help prevent the over identification of African American male students into specific categories of special education.

Systemic Change in Special Education

Of the six people who were interviewed and the 16 people that were surveyed, two people felt that a systemic change within the field of special education was necessary. The two people that called for the systematic change were the elementary principal and the director of special education.[1] The principal felt that in order to eliminate race and culture as factors leading to overrepresentation of African American males in special education, educators need to focus on meeting the needs of each individual child and eliminate the term special education from the lexicon applied to the profession in the process. Education would no longer be categorized in this scenario. The director of special education discussed things from a district standpoint. She said that the superintendent drives the culture of the district. Site administrators need to be educated and districts need to make cultural sensitivity a priority and part of the district culture. Districts

[1] The principal chose not to participate in the survey.

that do this have lowered the over identification of minorities in special education significantly. This would be brought about by implementing RTI and PBIS with fidelity and PBIS. The director of special education stated that all of these things take the commitment of the superintendent and the school community to produce systemic changes.

Conclusion

Research question three was related to changes that can be made in educational policy at the federal, state, and district level to prevent the overrepresentation of African American males in special education. The data collected identified that the following policy changes are necessary at the federal, state, and district levels: The use of unbiased assessments to ensure fairness for all and producing a systemic change within the field of special education that allows for focusing on the needs of each individual student.

CHAPTER V: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The role of an educator is to help each of their students reach their full academic and social potential. Educators are held responsible for classroom management, curriculum design, and student achievement. Educational administrators have similar duties but moreover they are responsible for managing human resources, fiscal responsibilities, safety of those within the school site/district, and student achievement on a larger scale.

The public school system is not prepared to support and aid the academic achievement of its African American male students. The obstacles that many African American male students are confronted with such as racism, poverty, and cultural misunderstanding often go unacknowledged (Noguera, 2008). As stated earlier, Hilliard (1992) states that

> This cultural misunderstanding has been shown to lead to errors in the estimation of a student's or a cultural group's: (1) intellectual potential (the consequences of which-mislabeling, misplacement, and mistreatment of children-are enormous); (2) learned abilities or achievement in academic subjects such as reading; and (3) language abilities. (p. 372)

These under estimations of African Americans' abilities often lead to educators teaching at a level below the students' knowledge capacity.

This chapter provides a summary of the study, including a statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, and methodology used, followed by findings and results related to the three research questions. In closing, implications and recommendations for future studies on the overrepresentation of African American males in specific categories of special education are detailed.

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the perceptions of elementary teachers and district administrators regarding the placement of African American males in special education programs. This study was based on research gathered through interviews and surveys with teachers and administrators working within the same school district in Los Angeles County. The study focused on their experiences working with African American male students that had been referred for special education based services. The interviews were conducted with six professional educators. These six educators consisted of one elementary general education teacher, two elementary special education teachers, an elementary school principal, an elementary school program specialist, and the district's special education director. The survey was emailed to 25 participants within the district (19 educational professionals within the district in addition to the six original educational professionals that were interviewed). Of the 25 potential survey participants, 14 teachers and two administrators chose to participate in the survey.

Research Questions

Three research questions were posed for this study. They were:

1. What do teachers and administrators perceive to be the early intervention measures in school policies and procedures that should be used by a school or school district to prevent the overrepresentation of African American males in special education?
2. What do teachers and administrators perceive to be the types of professional development for instruction that should help in preventing overrepresentation of African American males in special education?

3. What do teachers and administrators perceive to be the changes that should be made to federal, state and district policies to prevent the overrepresentation of African American males in special education?

Findings and Results

Research question one asked, What do teachers and administrators perceive to be the early intervention measures in school policies and procedures that should be used by a school or school district to prevent the overrepresentation of African American males in special education?

In response to research question 1, respondents offered that teaching to multiple learning modalities (Auditory, Kinesthetic, Tactile, Visual, etc.), evidenced based intervention such as Response to Intervention and Positive Behavior Intervention that offer strategies for behavior improvement as well as academic strategies for reading, language arts, and math, teacher modeling the patience with the learning process that educators would like children to model in social interactions, and assistance being offered to parents/guardians in order to help them better understand The Parents' Rights & Procedural Safeguards as they discuss the evaluation process for special education would all benefit African American male students and reduce their overrepresentation in special education.

Research question two asked, what do teachers and administrators perceive to be the types of professional development for instruction that should help in preventing overrepresentation of African American males in special education?

Respondents offered that professional development for teachers and site administrators in understanding multiple learning modalities, training on cultural sensitivity, monthly meetings for special education teachers that discuss at least one topic related to diversity and education, collaboration among special education teachers and general education teachers, as well as other

instructional support staff in an ongoing analysis of the effectiveness of instruction (This includes an evaluation and follow up process), changing the identification process for the qualifiers of emotional disturbance, intellectual disability, and specific learning disability, and helping educators and administrators to understand the behaviors & learning styles of all students and how to educate them within the general education setting would benefit African American male students and potentially reduce their overrepresentation within specific categories of special education.

Research question three asked, what do teachers and administrators perceive to be the changes that should be made to federal, state, and district policies to prevent the overrepresentation of African American males in special education?

Respondents offered that the use of alternative assessments to ensure fairness for all, the use of unbiased assessments, policies that reflect cultural sensitivity, and eliminating special education category entirely and focusing on the needs of each individual student would benefit African American male students and lead to a reduction in their overrepresentation in special education.

Implications and Recommendations

The significant findings associated with this study contribute to the body of scholarly literature by identifying ways in which to provide professional development to teachers and administrators, improve behavior management, and the types of policy changes that are necessary for a systemic change that could potentially disrupt the overrepresentation of African American males in specific categories of special education. These policy changes include changes to testing procedures for special education services, improving the referral process for

special education services, and cultural sensitivity training for teachers and administrators to reduce stereotypes and misunderstandings of the behaviors of African American males.

The information contained within this study can also be useful for current or aspiring educators seeking to improve the academic success of African American male students. It illustrates the role of educators in facilitating positive educational outcomes for African American male students.

Aas suggested by Howard, "In order for African American male students to succeed within the school setting, educators need to become more conscious of the role that racism plays in the school environment" (2008, p. 955). And as offered by Bertani et al. (2010),

> Educators should strive to be culturally sensitive in order to better understand all of their students. The following recommendations are designed and evaluated based on research that is related to best practices in instruction, educational leadership, academics, and behavioral problems for culturally responsive educators. (p. 41):

- Continual Professional Development: Teaching training and continual professional development is necessary for any educator seeking to disrupt the overrepresentation of African American male students in specific categories of special education. It is particularly important for them to become aware of the potential for cultural mismatch. Cultural mismatch occurs when teachers and administrators lack the skills necessary to interact with students who are different than themselves or recognize these differences as being okay. Educators should be trained so that they are culturally sensitive to the needs of all of their students. This will help their students in reaching their highest academic and social potential.

- Improved Behavior Management: This intervention recognizes that the classroom structure and lack of effective behavior management may play a role in the overrepresentation of disciplinary actions in regard to African American male students. The use of RTI and PBIS can help reduce the amount of African American male students being referred for special education services and allow them to excel within the general education environment.
- Family and Community Involvement: Enabling parent/guardian involvement allows educators to assess their own levels of cross-cultural competency as they engage in interactions with culturally diverse community members (Bertani et al., 2010, p. 24).

Recommendations for Future Study

For those interested in pursuing a greater depth of knowledge on the overrepresentation of African American males in special education, the following steps are recommended:

- Identifying the strategies utilized by educators and administrators among small, medium, and large sized school districts within the county, state, and on a national scale. This study analyzed results obtained from educators working within one suburban public school district in Los Angeles County.
- Financial and time constraints prevented the study from taking place over a lengthy period of time. Thus its generalizability is limited. Follow up studies carried out over a considerable amount of time would yield more results.
- This study suggested that a systematic change in policy would need to take place in order to decrease the overrepresentation of African American males in specific categories of special education. This policy change would involve top level

leadership acknowledging the need for change and that the first step in this process would need to be administrators receiving cultural sensitivity training in order to be viewed as authentic by stakeholders. Based on the results of the study, obtaining the perspective of top level administrators such as the superintendent, chief academic officer, director of secondary education, and director of elementary education would be useful in this regard.

Conclusions

Educators are aware of common cultural myths and stereotypes about African American males. Awareness of these negative messages about African American males can influence educators' interactions with, reactions, and interpretations of behavior. These biases may play themselves out within the school setting and leave African American male students as the subject of their teachers' pessimistic views (Noguera, 2008).

The academic experience of African American male students can be a negative one if their teachers' beliefs about them are centered on stereotypes. This situation increases the likelihood of African American male students being referred for special education services (Lewis & Moore, 2014). Thus, it is important that teachers create an engaging learning environment and realize that their actions may influence the academic trajectory of their African American male students (Lewis & Moore, 2014).

The public school system's failure to educate so many African American male students within the general education setting has produced tragic results. This cyclical trend not only inhibits the future success of African American male students but also the vitality of the African American Community at large. Our nation's educators are morally and ethically obligated to

ensure that every student is allowed the opportunity to reach their highest academic potential and this does not exclude African American males.

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APPENDIX A

Consent Letter

Hello my name is Nathan Goodly and I am a doctoral student in education at the University of Southern California. I am conducting a study on African American males in special education. Would you be willing to participate in an interview and survey on this topic (Please, sign here if the answer is yes)? _____

With your consent, the data accumulated from this study will be used for research purposes at the University of Southern California. Pseudonyms will be assigned for all students as well as school names & district personnel. The interview and survey will each take no longer than one hour to complete. Are you ready to begin?

APPENDIX B

Interview

Please answer the following questions according to your past experiences and current activities. Feel free to include any information you deem pertinent and relevant to this study in addition to these questions in the area provided **(Carroll, 2011, pg. 110-111).**

1. Please provide personal background information (i.e. age, gender, race, and position with the school district, level of education, special training).
2. How long have you worked with students with special education services?
3. What is your job title and where are you currently employed?
4. Who is usually the first person to suspect possible learning or behavioral disabilities? Teacher, Parent, Administrator, Program Specialist, Other? Circle the one you think is usually the one to make the first referrals.
5. Does your answer differ when it comes to African American males?
6. Do you believe the testing for these disabilities are adequate and free of biases?
7. Do you believe the testing procedures are designed to be effective across cultures?
8. How many children are enrolled in the special education program where you work?
9. Are some categories of students identified for special education larger than others? If so are African American students overrepresented in some categories?
10. What are the statistics pertaining to the age, race, and gender of the students enrolled?
11. If you believe there is an overrepresentation of African-American males in special education and if so, what do you think are the reasons for this?

12. What do you see as the role of race and cultural differences in children's placement in special education-, and in particular the placement of African-American male children?
13. What do you believe needs to be done to eliminate race and culture as factors leading to overrepresentation of African American males in special education?
14. What changes do you recommend to make the process of placing African American students in special education programs more fair and accurate?
15. What do you see as the role of teacher attitude and expectation in the placement of African American boys in special education? Explain your answer.
16. How do you view the role of teacher attitudes about boys as learners that could this possibly have an impact in their placement?
17. What teaching strategies and methods could be implemented to help educators work with children who learn “differently,” in lieu of labeling children and referring them to special education?
18. Please add your personal opinions and feelings or any other information you feel will substantially affect this study.

APPENDIX C

Survey

Culturally Responsive Checklist for Schools and Teachers (Griner & Stewart, 2012, pp.585-621).

- Please list your name, school district, and position below:

- The checklist of strategies for culturally responsive teaching was compiled from a review of research in the field, as well as suggestions from expert researchers, teacher educators, administrators, teachers, and parents, and community members representing students from diverse backgrounds.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING THE CHECKLIST: For each statement below, please do the following: (1) select your level of agreement, (2) select any of the quality indicators listed under each statement that you use or have seen in practice at your school district, (3) use the quality indicators to guide you in selecting your response to each statement.

Note: To be as inclusive as possible, references to families within this checklist may refer to biological parents, step-parents, adoptive or foster parents, legal guardians, other family members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc. and to social family members.

RCELD Students: This acronym refers to students who are racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse (RCELD). This term is used to describe RCELD

students, but also includes students that come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, that have experienced sustained school failure over time.

1. My school district has a set of guiding principles in place related to addressing the needs of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

2. Place a check by any of the quality indicators below that you have used or have seen in practice in your school district.

- A significant amount of discussion, profession development, and resources have been designated for these issues on a regular basis
- Resources are provided for staff to develop curricula that fosters an appreciation and deep understanding of diversity
- School district staff participate in an on-going staff development related to diversity issues: including opportunities for teachers to share and reflect on their own cultural beliefs and biases, opportunities for teachers and staff to become knowledgeable about the various RCELD populations and resources in the surrounding community
- ESL, special and general education teachers receive common professional development.

- Professional development support is provided to assist all staff in meeting the ongoing needs of RCELD students
- Other (please specify)

_____

3. The school district staff works collaboratively to support all students.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

4. Place a check by any of the quality indicators below that you have used or have seen in practice in your school district.

- There is extensive and effective collaborative interaction between general education teachers, special education teachers, and other support staff, which includes regular co-planning, co-teaching, and discussions regarding specific staff and teacher roles and responsibilities, with a focus on meeting the needs of RCELD students.
- Schedules allow maximum time for shared planning and teaching amongst general and special education teachers and other instructional support staff.
- Peer support mentors are provided for instructional team members as needed

- Co-planning and co-teaching occur regularly with a focus on meeting the needs of all students
- Special education teachers and general education teachers, as well as other instructional support staff participate collaboratively in ongoing analysis of the effectiveness of instruction, particularly with RCELD
- Paras, parent liaison, teachers, and community centers work together
- Regular and special education teachers share the same expectations for students regardless of ability
- Other (please specify)

_____

5. The school district staff establishes strong home/school connections by making concerted efforts to reach out to parents/family members of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds by fostering collaboration, mutual trust, and respect.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

6. Please select any of the quality indicators below that you use or have seen used in your school district:

- School district hosts events for parents/families of RCELD students on a regular basis (e.g., potluck meals, parent groups)
- School district provides opportunities for parents/family members of RCELD students to participate in regularly scheduled meetings outside the school setting (e.g. at community centers, through flexible scheduling, considering of transportation needs).
- Multiple attempts are made to involve parents/family members
- School district administrators promote staff knowledge of diverse cultures (i.e. through professional development, partnership with local colleges for participation in course work related to culturally equity, etc.)
- Problem solving teams include parents/family members of RCELD students in meeting discussions to formulate instructional and behavioral recommendations
- Staff members offer to meet with parents outside the school setting (e.g. home visits or community sites)
- Staff members develop relationships with surrounding RCELD communities to assist the school with translation, cultural interpretation, and other needs and also to elicit services appropriate to student needs
- Parents are encouraged to help their children maintain their native language while learning English
- Printed materials (bulletin boards, school publications, etc.) are available in home languages of all children in the school.

- Home visits/regular phone calls are encouraged to gain insight into students' lives and support systems, as well as to garner parent/family member input in the decision making process
- Parents/families/community members are invited regularly into classrooms.
- School district staff regularly reach out to families of RCELD students by involving them in school meetings and problem solving discussions
- School district staff actively seek the involvement and decision making input of families of RCELD students and are committed to learning about the cultures of those families and empowering them to become an active participant in the school and their child's education
- School district staff makes continuous contact over summer (phone calls, post cards)
- School district staff celebrate special events in students' lives (birthdays, out of school accomplishments)
- School district staff provides voicemails in native language of who may not be literate in their first language
- School district staff makes attempt to understand what's important to families during holidays.
- School district staff makes positive contacts with parents first, before problems arise.
- School district staff encourages and provides a space for parent support groups to help parents from RCELD backgrounds become more involved.

- Professional development allows time for teachers to get to know the communities of their students.
- Other (please specify)

_____

7. The school district staff views students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and their families as assets.

   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

8. Place a check by any quality indicators that you have seen used in your school district:
   - There is clear evidence that RCELD students and their families are viewed as assets. Parents, families, and community members from RCELD backgrounds are invited to share in school processes and to share their knowledge, expertise, and experiences with school staff and students.
   - Staff share realistic and high expectations for RCELD student achievement and behavior.
   - All students, including RCELD students, are regularly recognized and honored for their work.

- School organizations, committees, clubs, and activities reflect the ethnic makeup of the student population
- Bilingual programming is used to support ESL students
- School materials translated for non-English speaking families (or translators provided for voice mails and in person meetings)
- School staff take opportunities to become knowledgeable about the various RCELD populations and resources in the surrounding community
- School staff celebrates students' successes regularly
- See suggestions from question 3 as well.
- Other (please specify)

_____

9. The school district staff incorporates culturally responsive materials and content in the curricula and use culturally responsive teaching practices.

    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Neutral
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree

10. Place a check by any of the quality indicators below that you have used or have seen in practice in your school district.

- School staff regularly incorporates culturally responsive materials, content, and teaching practices. School staff constantly seek to add to their knowledge of culturally responsive practices and there is ongoing review of the effectiveness of staff practices on RCELD student learning.
- School staff validates students' cultural identities in classroom practices (understands and integrates students' family makeup, immigration history and experiences, individual concerns, strengths, talents and interests into the curriculum, utilizes students' native language resources.
- All students are educated about diversity.
- School staff promotes equity and mutual respect among students.
- Students are motivated to become active participants in their learning: encouraged to think critically, strive for excellence, and become socially and politically conscious (i.e. identifies and extinguishes myths about their cultures).
- School staff seeks to understand students' prior knowledge and experience with specific subject areas and topics in the curriculum.
- School staff shows interest and encouragement of students' native language through the use of some vocabulary to better communicate with students.
- Teachers regularly explain how/why students' responses are correct/incorrect (Timely feedback for error corrections and positive reinforcement).
- School environments contains regular evidence of contributions/work from individuals with diverse backgrounds, rather than just during a special week or month.
- A variety of scaffolding techniques are used to enhance instruction.

- Classroom materials include stories and perspectives from diverse cultures, as well as materials provided in native language represented in the classroom.
- Classroom instruction is varied (e.g., small group, cooperative learning high teacher-student interaction).
- High energy and animation in the classroom, real world relevant learning activities, increased teacher-student interactions.
- Students' differences as well as their commonalities are acknowledged.
- Homework assignments are adapted to specific needs of RCELD students.
- Teachers exhibit instructional use of multiple intelligences and various learning styles.
- Teachers use appropriate technology integration within the classroom.
- RCELD students receive additional review and practice in difficulty areas.
- Direct, frequent, and continuous monitoring of RCELD student progress and instruction occurs.
- Differentiated instruction to address specific needs of RCELD students is used regularly.
- Other (please specify)

_____

11. The school district staff uses culturally responsive behavior management practices by considering the impact of culture on the school performance of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree

- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

12. Place a check by any quality indicators that you have used or seen in practice in your school district:
    - School staff discuss students' culture and conducts systematic analysis of its impact on school performance. The systematic analysis of the student's culture and potential impact on behavior include staff discussions with the family about home expectations and behavior management practices and staff self-assessments of their own cultural expectations and practices.
    - Classroom rules and procedures are accommodating to diverse student learning styles, (all styles are actively involved in instruction and other classroom activities to the extent possible, understanding of all types of knowledge valued by students' parents/families).
    - Individualized behavior supports to address the needs of RCELD students.
    - Classroom examples of understanding behavioral differences of RCELD students, (e.g., expressed preference for working individually or in groups, seating arrangements balanced by ethnicity and gender, listening and responding style, peer interacting patterns, responses to authority, verbal and nonverbal communication, turn taking behaviors).
    - Individualized behavior plans are created as appropriate.

- When necessary, RCELD students in classrooms have behavioral management systems that address individual cultural differences
- Staff confer with family about home expectations, values, customs, and behavior management practices.
- Staff engage in self-assessments of their own cultural expectations and practices.
- General education classroom instructional groupings promote heterogeneous groups of students working together.
- Teachers implement flexible groupings of students for different purposes.
- Efforts are made to create positive learning environment where there is a community of learners that assist and collaborate with one another, (i.e. time devoted to social skills instruction and problem solving skills).
- Classrooms promote conversational interactions between students
- The use of Reading buddies, Cooperative learning groups.
- Cross age peer tutoring, and peer teaching is used where limited-English-proficient students can participate and practice English-language skills in small groups.
- The Instructional Team regularly uses peer supports in classrooms and continuously seeks to empower students to take a more active responsibility for their learning and supporting each other.
- School has established procedures that emphasize positive behaviors and regularly recognizes students for displaying appropriate behaviors.
- School staff have been trained in the implementation of a positive behavioral support system.

- Classroom incentive plans for positive behavior have been implemented.
- Administration provides resources for evidence-based social skills instruction.
- Issues of intolerance are dealt with immediately according to the school's anti-harassment policies.
- Classroom time and is devoted to social skills instruction and problem solving skills.
- The school has implemented a positive behavioral support system for all students, staff have been trained in its use, and school staff regularly discuss the effectiveness of school-wide positive behavioral support interventions.
- Classroom procedures and routines are actively taught to students with periodic reminders and implemented consistently.
- Classroom transitions are short and smooth.
- Teacher-student interactions are positive.
- Alternatives to school suspension are in place and regularly considered.
- Other (please specify)

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13. Your school district uses data from these multiple sources drive instructional decisions: formal and informal assessments, observations, analysis of data from previous school years, ongoing progress monitoring data, information from family about students' home and family culture, language, and social history to drive instructional decisions.
    - Strongly agree

- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

14. Place a check by the quality indicators that you have used or seen in practice in your school district:
    - School staff have implemented a systematic, problem solving process that includes all of the above sources to drive instructional decisions.
    - Academic expectations for individual students are based on multiple data sources and individual ability rather than broad-based assumptions.
    - Staff encourage high rate of observable, measurable students responses.
    - Problem-solving teams are active and engaged in problem solving discussions on a regular basis.
    - Student progress-monitoring data is used to track performance and evaluate school practices.
    - Examples of problem-solving teams of implemented interventions with data on targeted behavior(s) of a RCELD student for a reasonable amount of time.
    - Problem-solving teams provide follow-up support and monitoring of planned interventions.
    - Multiple data sources are used to evaluate student learning: i.e. standardized tests, informal assessments, observations, verbal and written assessments, assessment data from years prior.

- Families encouraged to participate in problem solving discussions to include information about students home and family culture, language, and social history.
- Data from general education classroom interventions designed to provide academic and/or behavioral support to a RCELD student.
- Classroom examples of informal, curriculum-based, authentic assessments on academic performance of RCELD students are regularly used.
- The instructional team considers working with other agencies is needed, such as mental health clinics for professional development and partnership on mental health issues that may be affecting student performance.
- Other (please specify)

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15. The school district staff actively seeks to identify other possible explanations for RCELD students' behavior or learning difficulties rather than automatically assuming student deficit or disability? Reasons such as: family mobility, insufficient instruction, limited English proficiency, family risk factors, or cultural differences between school and home expectations, home/school communication barriers, and/or students' access to resources?
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Neutral
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree

16. Place a check by any quality indicators that you have used or seen in practice in your school district:
    - School staff have implemented a problem solving process that includes a thorough analysis of student's home and instructional environment and an extensive array of classroom interventions are implemented prior to special education referral, possible retention, or other academic or disciplinary decisions.
    - School and classroom environmental assessment is conducted to determine possible explanations for the problems experienced by RCELD student.
    - There is regular, systematic use of curriculum-based assessment and error analyses data.
    - Problem-solving teams' recommendations focus on positive behavioral interventions and student strengths.
    - Delineated and comprehensive referral process in in place.
    - If applicable, the instructional team discusses a RCELD student and his/her excessive school absence or past history of mobility.
    - The instructional team reviews and discusses number of excused, unexcused absences, truancies, and tardiness and its effect of students' learning, behavior, or other difficulties.
    - Strategies to increase attendance have been documented.
    - Student and family support from school staff for attendance issues.
    - Home visits occur often.

- Excessive absences or family mobility are discussed by the Instructional Team with detailed and incisive analysis of the impact on the continuity of general education classroom instruction for the RCELD student, and recommendations on how to minimize the instructional impact in the future.
- Additional, culture-specific assistance is sought to provide appropriate instruction before referring RCELD students to next tier of intervention.
- Life stressors are assessed, (i.e. divorce, death of a family member).
- Team discusses family risk factors (i.e. exposure to toxic substances or violence/abuse) and the effect on students' learning, behavior, or other difficulties.
- Team discusses environmental, social, economic, and cultural factors to be considered.
- Issues of insufficient instruction are explored, (i.e. review of previous interruptions of instruction in prior classes).
- Students' parents/family have an equal voice in problem-solving and decision making to determine reasons for student learning, behavior, or other difficulties
- Analysis of problem behaviors are regularly conducted to assess RCELD students.
- Informal, curriculum-based, authentic assessments on academic performance of RCELD students is regularly used in the classroom.
- Parents are consulted to gain a better understanding of parent expectations for the student.

- Mentoring programs have been implemented school wide.
- There are consistent discipline expectations for all students.
- Other (please specify)

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17. Are there any specific quality indicators that you plan to implement in your school district or classroom? If yes, which ones?

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18. Create a 3-5 step action plan outline for implementing one or more of the quality indicators you plan on implementing from the above question.

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